

Epiphany

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"DIE NEUE ZEIT BEDARF DER  
NEUEN SCHULE."

A SCHOOLMASTER'S REVERIE.

"How hard it is to turn your thoughts on! Switzerland was a mistake, so far as that goes; but to have been alive in every pore for a month is something. This night train should help, though: here goes! let us face the situation. I, Michael St. John Harrowby, aged thirty-five, have got, more by good luck than merit, the head mastership of the Wintonley Grammar School. One's first thought is, naturally, for wife and bairns, and Fanny was sadly pinched at Appledore. Dear girl! I hope the strain is at an end for her. She will enjoy mothering the boarders along with our own five.

"But here am I on the old string which we have harped upon a thousand times since I got the post—the gain to ourselves and the children. There is nothing we have not canvassed, to the Butler scholarship for baby Tim, so why go over the ground again?

"O, shade of Jack Horner, *enfant terrible*, does every man-jack of us eat his plum in his corner to the tune of 'What a good boy am I?' Effort and aspiration for those others who miss the plums? Well, I have my thoughts, if I could only get at them. Cakes and ale are not everything.

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"No, cakes and ale are not the whole, and now that a fair field offers, I wonder what I shall make of the thoughts working for these last ten years! Three months ago I could have revolutionised the whole educational system — like Moses, who was plucky enough about the exodus till his time came. Give you a chance, though, and you feel that the other men have experience on their side, and that, what is, is best. But that is laziness, cowardice. Come, Michael, man! You know in your heart that this chance has come to you just because you have thought out a few things that should be of use. That is what the world wants. Somehow, people have grown too humble and teachable to think for themselves.

that this shews a very imperfect knowledge of human nature? Children *like* strictness. They like something that they can lean their whole weight against, or pull as hard at as they please, without its giving way. They *like* something firmer and stronger than themselves. In these days when our young men, and to a certain extent our young women, are going out to the four quarters of the world, how important is it that they should do justice to themselves and to their homes! In these days when even the son of a working man may come to be an archbishop or member of Parliament, or high in some other profession, how much he may have to thank his mother for if his manners are good; how much to regret if they are bad. How hard it is to put up with even a distinguished man if he is unpunctual, keeps people waiting, does not answer his letters, is awkward and uncouth in his personal habits, rude and discourteous in his manners; if he cannot speak a few words clearly and collectedly in public, or, on the other hand, if he is tiresome, prosy, and long-winded, and how often parents can make or mar their children in these ways!

But I must hurry on to the conclusion. May I venture to say one other thing? and that is that fathers should never treat mothers, or mothers fathers disrespectfully before the children. If a man flatly contradicts his wife, or a woman her husband, how can they expect the children not to follow suit? The habit of reverence is almost dying out in some quarters. How, for instance, can children look up to their clergyman or their teachers if parents criticise and laugh at them in their presence? I know this calls for very disagreeable self-restraint sometimes on the part of us grown-up people—but is not such self-restraint very good for us? Providence sends children into this world to educate the grown-up people, quite as much as to be educated by them, and though we have no children of our own we can still very often say in the words of the poet:—

“O dearest, dearest boy, my heart  
For better lore would seldom yearn—  
Could I but teach the hundredth part  
Of what from thee I learn.”



These are wonderful times, beautiful times! We are all so open to conviction, so agog for the right and the true. We may be gulled by false prophets, with their 'lo, here!' and 'lo, there!' but then, how ready we are to follow the lead of any with the least gift of insight!

"In the matter of education, we are hovering round the truth; that education is not merely a preparation for life, but the work of the lifetime, is boldly announced. And, given this much insight, is it conceivable that the education in point is no more than the cramming of a few text books? Like religion, education is nothing or it is everything—a consuming fire in the bones. How is it that we do not see through the hurry of eating and drinking, getting and having, that our prime business here is to raise up a generation better than ourselves?

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"'New schools for the new times' is the burden of a pamphlet\* I picked up at Offenbach, the outcome of the congress of the '*deutschen Freidenkerbundes*.' It is as well to know what is before us. 'Knowledge is power' is not an alarmingly new sentiment; that the people have a right to the power which knowledge gives, that the knowledge which avails is that which qualifies a man for his life as a 'social animal,' we are prepared to admit. That the talent, the genius, which smoulder to-day in the heated rooms of a thousand factories, or is choked in a thousand damp cellar dwellings, is to be cherished by the schools of the future to the infinite advantage of the whole commonweal—that touches a burning question. One is not sure that cellars, any more than drawing rooms, breed geniuses by the thousand, but that is not the point, the question is—'the pauper population,' the 'criminal classes.' Shame on us that such phrases are possible to our English speech. Yes, we are glad and willing to have the poor always with us to instruct us in righteousness; but then, what hope for us of health and beauty as a nation with this cancer at our bowels?

"Apart from these, the 'unspeakable' residue, how do we stand? That is, where there is work and bread, how do the people fare for education, and what are the chances for a working man's child blessed with talent or genius?

Tolerably good in the large towns; in ordinary cases, the possibilities of education are limited by the length of time the parents can afford to keep their child; indeed, the law steps in to constrain the parents and to fix a minimum standard of attainments without which the child is not free to labour; he must read, though not fluently; write, though not easily nor correctly; must be able to add and subtract, divide and multiply with some readiness. This is not much, but it is a setting of the gates ajar for the child of genius; and supposing that his parents are able and willing to feed and clothe him during his adolescence, his prospects are good. He wins scholarships at the first, which carry him through the second-grade school, and here he may win scholarships which will cover his University career. I know of a dozen instances of University men who have worked their way up from very low estate—the sons of journeymen labourers, of mill 'hands,' of petty traders, and that with honour and consideration too, for school and college alike bid for brains, seeing that their own status depends on the men they turn out. This state of things is a mere *pis aller*; in Scotland, as well as further afield, they manage matters better: but 'reform' is in the air; our whole educational system is about to be overhauled, and meantime it is pleasant to know that education is *possible* to the son of the poor man who is born a genius, and is blessed with self-denying parents, and—one more qualification—who lives in a town.

"What have we here? 'Nothing,' says *Pädagoge* Diesterweg, 'has more attraction for man than truth. To find it he will wander into distant lands, over desert and mountain, will search the depths of the earth, will climb into the heavens; no effort is to him too great, no obstacle too fearful, no labour too hard; his soul thirsts after truth.' This is suggestive, and the conclusion that, in the schools, the children should be nourished upon truth, goes without saying. But we come back to Pilate's world-famed question.

"My pedagogue means something, however, 'Moses, Moses, *und immer Moses*,' is the burden of a bitter cry. He complains that, in the Fatherland, a sixth, and sometimes more, of the time spent in school (in elementary schools) is devoted to religious instruction—Bible-lesson and psalm, catechism and hymn; and what time is left, is the cry, for literature,



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for metaphysics, ethics, what not, the stories of wisdom that should be laid open to poor as to rich? So, after all, we in England are well in advance. Nowhere with us are two out of twelve, much less sixteen out of twenty-four school hours devoted to religious instruction. Psalm, hymn, and catechism have departed; the Bible lesson is pared down to a shred; and, all the time, we do not see that we have deprived the people of the classics, the metaphysics, the ethics—as well as the religion—peculiarly their own. Instead, we have put into their hands—'Readers'—scraps of science, of history, of geography—saw-dust, that cannot take root downwards and bear fruit upwards in human soil.

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"But here is matter that concerns us more closely. We learn for life, not for the schools: good and well; nothing new in that. Here we have it:—'*Wie?*—sagt Prof. Dodel-Port in seiner neuesten Brochure: '*Moses oder Darwin?*' Dodel-Port is plucky, or reckless, but that is the situation. What think ye of Moses? is the crux. The worst of it is, a man may let his own thoughts simmer, but the young will have something definite, and you cannot hide anything from them. Say nothing, and they know what it means as well as if you proclaimed yourself from the house-top. Well, as a matter of fact, it is *not* 'Moses or Darwin?' with me. I receive both, not by way of compromise, but in faith, believing that each, though in widely differing degrees, speaks a revealed word. But, how to put it to the boys? They *will* take sides, they doubt your sincerity if you do not.

"*Loyalty* shall be our key-note. In a home children are under natural conditions, and each develops on his own lines. In a school you must have an *enthusiasm*, must strike a note that vibrates in every breast to secure the common feeling without which there is no life. Loyalty will do—chivalrous loyalty to each other, to the school, to their homes, to those in authority: then, the highest enthusiasm, the loyalty of Christian service. I hardly see how to work it yet, but when one is steadfastly purposed, ways arise. Supposing, then, the loyalty that does not permit itself to harbour dishonouring thoughts. Suppose a passion of loyal service kindled in some breasts, and more or less affecting all, is criticism to be tabooed as disloyal? Are the boys to go into the world

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ignorant of the questions that are searching many hearts, to be staggered by the first shock of evidence and opinion running counter to the old thoughts? No; but how I wish I could do the boys the like inestimable service that a great teacher has done for me and many another! It is difficult to put into words, but, somehow, you are landed on the other side of the controversies of the day: they are of immense interest, but not vital to you. It is just, to compare lesser things with great, as the husband of a famous woman might listen to discussions about his wife's works or published letters. Are they hers or are they not? Do they disclose parts of her life or fancies? Are the opinions put into the mouths of her best characters truly her own? Most interesting to hear what the world says, but, for him, he *knows* where the world guesses. Besides, these things are not vital; the vital thing is herself and their mutual relations. So, but infinitely more so, of our apprehension of the Highest, and our cognisance of the supreme relationship. Reveal to the eyes of youth the vision of the infinite Loveliness, lay bare the heart of youth to the drawings of the irresistible Tenderness, let them know, of their own intimate knowledge, that

'The thoughts of God are broader than the measure of man's mind,  
And the heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind,'

and all other knowledge and relationships and facts of life will settle themselves. Thus, only, is it possible to live joyfully, purposefully, diligently. Without this—madness! or, the foolish playing of a foolish mummer's part in the presence of the 'eternal verities.' But, boys religiously brought up turn out indifferent or ill? Exactly so, when they have had the outward and visible signs without the inward part or thing signified. Of all sawdust, this is the driest. No soul, once laid open to the touch of the divine tenderness, can go away and forget. Go away, a wilful soul may, but come back it needs must. Well, it is something to see one's work; but, how to do it? At any rate, seeing these things, a man must go softly all his days and wait for light.

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"In this connection we must face the attitude of public opinion with regard to the Sacred Books. 'Yea, hath God said?' is the question of the hour, and probably will be the



question of the hour so long as the world endures. We who teach must hold unalterable convictions in this regard, unalterable and therefore our grounds must be deep, broad, and high, covering and underlying every point of attack. We must know with absolute certainty that here is revelation—its claim to be so resting upon internal evidence alone, the quality of that which is revealed! Let us ask what is the subject of revelation. The history of the people called Jews? The history of the beginning, and predictions of the end of all things? We are told to-day that upon the one as upon the other the light is thrown 'through storied windows richly dight'; that the apple and the garden bear no more direct, material interpretation than the 'tree which bears twelve manner of fruits, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations'; that 'without a parable spake he not unto them' applies more or less to what we call the history of the Bible. Perhaps the marvellous and inspired quality of the Scriptures is more brought out by attacks upon their historic truth than in any other way. Whether men choose to regard the story of the Fall as a record, a poem, a fable, a parable, a vision, its inherent teaching is the same. We have here the story of the decline and fall and hope to rise again of every soul of man.

"The history of the Jews, again, what is it more, say the enlightened, than a collection of the myths of the heroic age of a nation—when the gods walked with men: myths that have their parallels, often curiously close, in the sacred legends of nations to which we do not allow divine inspiration? Here, again, the history justifies itself by its truth to human experience. The sun stands still, even now, for the finishing of our righteous acts; the Jordan parts before us in our extremities. Here we have parables of our lives to be spiritually discerned, and, more, here we have an unfailing key to the interpretation of our times—this is by inspiration of God.

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"The 'carnage,' the 'wholesale slaughterings,' ascribed to Almighty God, wrought directly by His hand, or according to His will, are brought forward as irreconcilable with our conceptions of the All-good. These things happen to-day, and we have not the courage to ascribe them to God. Few amongst us are able to stand up and say, 'though He slay

me and my fellows, yet will I trust in Him.' We dare not say, 'Here is the finger of God.' Some describe these events by a string of epithets, all of more or less pagan origin. Fortune, the stars, the fates, work us mischief. We suffer from misfortunes, mischances, casualties, catastrophes, disasters, fatalities—more reassuring, doubtless, and more scientific than the creed of the Old Testament. Is it true, then, that flood and famine, and slaughter in battle, are the will and the work of the good God? The Old Testament asserts as much, and the New has a tender word about a sparrow falling to the ground, which goes to prove that these things are at any rate permitted. Perhaps life and death are less momentous than we suppose; death, perhaps, is no way final whether as regards opportunity or existence; what if it even opened a chance to 'try again'? We cannot know; revelation is silent; and as for science, when science has a definite utterance to make about the facts of life under her eyes, we shall hear what she says about these other mysteries. At any rate, in that Bosom where every pain found its pity, there was none for the three who tasted death—only for the grief that mourned them. As for all the anguish of life, the miseries of the mind distressed, the writhings of the suffering body, who shall find his pain intolerable when he thinks upon the Cross?

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"We schoolmasters must face the situation; we must shirk nothing, take nothing for granted. We must fortify the boys against attack, and arm them for a chivalrous defence. As for definite tactics, suppose we concede for the moment, and for argument's sake, all that is attacked, and then see where we are. The earthworks thrown up from time to time are sadly torn up, but the fortress is intact. Panic gives way to confidence; come who may, we are ready, and not only so, we take up the offensive; our position is proof against all sallies; it is the enemy who are exposed. This seems to me important. Defensive warfare is never carried on with the enthusiasm of conviction which warms him who attacks. As a matter of fact, we are prepared to yield no iota of the Sacred Scriptures, while of the obscurities of the Old Testament, as of the Apocalypse, we say only—

'Lord, I believe what herein I do read.  
But, alas, I do not understand.'